Kerepakupai Vena (979 m)
Venezuela
A Must-See Destination

Characterised by geographic contrast and a rich cultural heritage, Venezuela is a very attractive tourist destination offering a great variety of recreational opportunities to national as well as international tourists.

In the following you will learn more about the geographical, scenical, historical and cultural aspects of Venezuela.

Kavac, Canaima National Park

Red Ibis

VENEZUELA – A MUST-SEE DESTINATION

On its continental area of 916,445 square kilometers and its 311 offshore islands, Venezuela is home to a great variety of natural and cultural environments.

The varied physical factors, such as location, rainfalls, humidity, concentration of fogs and clouds in the mountains, trade winds, height, age and formation of rocks, have created different natural conditions enabling the development of a multi-faceted vegetation with a rich flora and fauna. With regards to its biodiversity, Venezuela is among the top ten countries worldwide and within Latin America among the top six. Within South America only Brazil and Colombia have a larger variety of plants. This biodiversity manifests itself in approximately 25,000 plants, 323 mammalian, 283 reptilian, 202 amphibian and 1,383 avian species showing the country's great potential for nature-based forms of tourism.

Thanks to Venezuela's environmental policy, which has been promoted early on, great part of its landscapes are protected nature reserves in the form of national parks, natural monuments or wild life refuges.

There are 43 national parks (NP), 35 protected natural monuments and 7 wild life refuges covering approximately 22% of the Venezuelan territory. In each state there is at least one national park or natural monument.

However, not only Venezuela's natural diversity offers great potential for tourism, but it is also a very interesting and diverse country in terms of its cultural landscape, religion, celebrations, gastronomy, music, architecture and popular arts and crafts.

This socio-cultural wealth is the product of many regional cultures that differ greatly from one federal state to another. It is the result of many processes (colonization, ethnic composition, religious syncretism, economy, etc.) as well as natural factors (location, climate, vegetation, etc.).

Nowadays, Venezuela is also a modern country with interesting and vibrant cities characterised by their Latin flavour.

The dualism of majestic untamed landscapes and modern metropolis (as for example Caracas) makes the country especially attractive and makes the introduction into the South American continent easier to tourists from Western industrial countries as it helps understand the South American mentality.

The country's touristic sights are located in its five major biomes: the coastal strips and Cordilleras, the Orinoco Delta, the table mountains (mountains ranges of Guyana), the endless expanse of the llanos with the Orinoco Plains and the Venezuelan Andes.
Each one of those nature and landscape zones with their typical cultural and touristic infrastructure offer visitors a wide range of recreation opportunities.

Ciudad Bolívar

THE COASTS
Sun, Sand And Sea

The picturesque mountain range called “Cordillera de la Costa” is one of Venezuela’s most impressive landscapes. For this reason great part of it is protected by national parks.

Playa Medina, Peninsula of Paria

Especially enticing for tourists are the numerous tropical beaches on the 311 offshore islands and along the more than 3,000 km wide coastal strip.

Venezuela’s largest island Isla Margarita is well-known to many sun-seeking tourists from around the world. Its largest town Porlamar is the gate to the other islands and for many people, also to Venezuela. If you visit Isla Margarita, do not leave without having visited its fantastic beaches. There is a lot to discover on the route along the numerous beaches like Guacuco, Cardón, El Tirano, Parguito, Puerto Cruz, Caribe and El Agua, the longest and most visited beach of the island. Featuring two national parks and three natural monuments, that in total cover 26% of its surface, the island also has a lot to offer to nature lovers.

The beach Playa El Yaque attracts windsurfing and kite surfing enthusiasts – for both kinds of sport El Yaque is a real dream. Constant winds and its shallow waters have made this beach world famous; Every year the world cup in windsurfing takes place here. Other possible activities on Isla Margarita are golfing, horse-riding, Jeep safaris, mountain biking, hiking, kayaking, diving and duty-free shopping.

Playa el Agua, Margarita Island

Los Roques National Park

THE ARCHIPIÉLAGO LOS ROQUES

Around 180 kilometres north of Caracas the Los Roques archipelago crowns Venezuela's fantastic multitude of Caribbean idyllic beaches. Fine white sand, water in different shades of blue and green, ranging from emerald to turquoise green and in the sky an almost ceaseless sun (over 3,000 hours of sunshine per year) are awaiting you in romantic seclusion. Those who like being under water can look forward to a colourful underwater paradise. No wonder, then, that Los Roques is so popular with visitors from within Venezuela as well as from abroad.

Los Roques consists of 42 small islands called Cayos. Additionally, there are around 300 rocky reeves as well as sandbanks and coral reefs that, similar to an atoll, enclose a central lagoon. Some of them only emerge from the wonderfully warm see during low tide. Gran Roque is the only island of that group with a small settlement. It is the main island of the archipelago and has an airport (with daily flights to Caracas and Isla Margarita) as well as a variety of posadas (small pensions) to stay the night.

In 1972 the archipelago was declared national park. With an area of 225,000 hectares, the archipelago is one of the largest nature reserves of the Caribbean. In certain parts of the park access is prohibited to visitors in order to ensure that future generations will be able to continue enjoying this wonderful experience.

THE COUNTRY'S BASIN AREA

Apart from the beaches, Venezuela's coastal regions and basin areas are known for their mangrove swamps and their numerous unspoiled coral reefs which form an important habitat for many species. The basin areas in the north-west of Venezuela also feature very interesting areas that are waiting to be discovered by visitors. In the national park Ciénagas de Juan Manuel south of the Maracaibo lakes, gallery forests and navigable rivers with a surprising variety of flora and fauna may be discovered.

Río Concha, Maracaibo Lake

THE ORINOCO DELTA

Orinoco River

Tucan

South America's third largest river winds its way 2,140 kilometers through Venezuela, flowing through and marking great parts of the country. The Orinoco originates in the mountain Delgado Chalbaud at the border with Brazil.From there the Orinoco flows hundreds of kilometers to the north and later to the south-east until it eventually reaches the Orinoco Delta.

With an area of 40,000 square kilometers the Orinoco Delta is the world's second largest river delta. Before flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, it branches off into 40 main branches and 400 sub-branches creating thousands of islands. The Orinoco Delta is a sensitive ecological system that is home to over 2,000 plant species and a great variety of land and water species. In addition to this biodiversity there is the rich cultural heritage of the Warao indigenous people (boat people). Venezuela is home to more than 20 ethnic groups accounting for about 2% of the country's population. The Warao indigenous people are one of them and they live in harmonious balance with their surroundings. The Warao people know how to move on water in a masterly manner and learn to use a canoe at an early age.

The panoramic view of the delta is one of the most magnificent views in the world; the area formed by sedimentary accumulation is one of the areas that have been least influenced by human intervention. However, the area has much more to offer than may be seen from above. There is an immense variety of animals, such as birds and fish as well as some endangered mammals like bush dogs, otters, ocelots, jaguars and sea cows.

In 2009 this important natural and cultural heritage was declared Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizing its importance for the environment being one of the seven most important deltas in the world.

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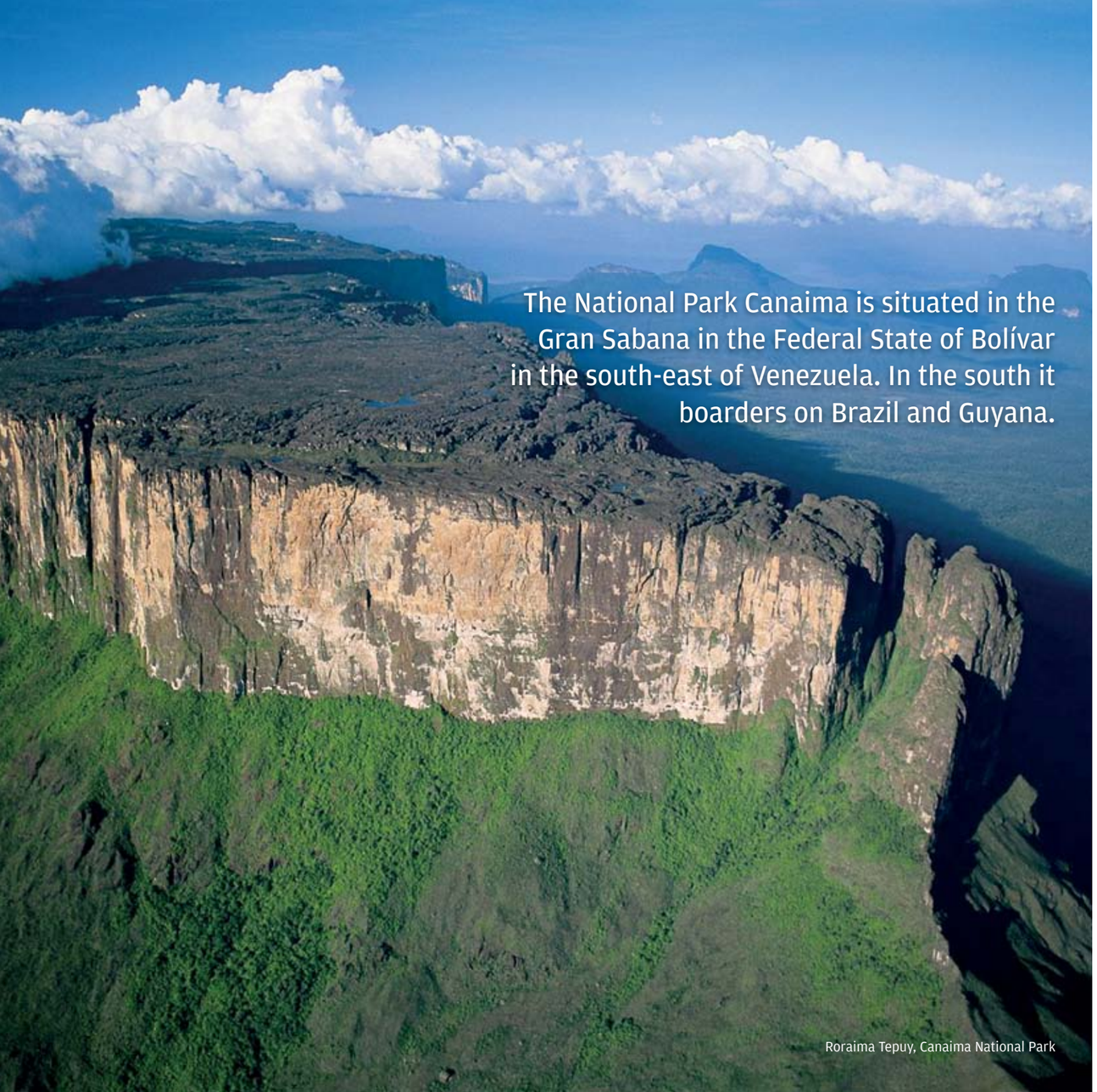

The National Park Canaima is situated in the Gran Sabana in the Federal State of Bolívar in the south-east of Venezuela. In the south it boarders on Brazil and Guyana.

Roraima Tepuy, Canaima National Park

THE TABLE MOUNTAINS OF VENEZUELA

One of South America's most peculiar landscapes is the Gran Sabana in the south of Venezuela. From this plateau arise enormous, bizarre table mountains, the so-called Tepuys (or Tepuis). The word "Tepuy" comes from the language of the Pemón Indians, who are living in this area, and means "House of the Gods".

Even today many of the inaccessible Tepuys are still a blank area on the map or they have only recently been investigated in more detail. It is assumed that about 70% of the plant species on the Tepuys are endemic, which means that they only exist there.

The whole Gran Sabana, that is protected in great part through the National Park Canaima, is situated in an area that geologists denote Guyana Shield. Being at least 1.7 billion years old, the rocks of this region are some of the oldest sedimentary rocks that up until now have been found in the world.

THE NATIONAL PARK CANAIMA

With a total area of 30,000 square kilometers, it is Venezuela's largest park and also one of the largest ones in the world. In 1994 it was denominated World Natural Heritage by the UNESCO.

The Auyán-Tepuy as well as other table mountains, such as the Roraima, the Kukenán or the large Chimantá Massif, are located in the National Park Canaima.

In the western part of the park there is the lagoon of Canaima with beaches that are surrounded by little forests. The idyllic water falls Ucaima, Hacha, El Sapo, El Sapito and Golondrina are very close by and are easy to reach by boat.

The Canaima Lagoon (also called Canaima) is the place of the national park that has most been developed for tourism. There are enough overnight accommodations in camps to meet the current demand. Canaima is only accessible by little airplanes (for example from Isla Margarita, Ciudad Bolívar, Puerto Ordaz or Caracas) which luckily has prevented the emergence of mass tourism.

The eastern part of the park can also be reached by car (from Ciudad Bolívar and Puerto Ordaz). From there the spectacular Tepuy Mountains of the East, containing waterfalls like the Kamá, Aponwao and Karuai-Merú, may be conquered. The Roraima is the highest mountain in the overwhelming world of the Tepuyes and can be climbed within two to three days.

THE LLANOS

Animal safari in the land of the Venezuelan Cowboys

The Venezuelan Llanos range from the eastern foothills of the Andes in the north to the Orinoco in the south. The Spanish word “llano” means flatland or plain. The Llanos exist of enormous pasturelands, a savana landscape that is interlaced with countless rivers. This gigantic lowland extends over around one third of the Venezuelan territory.

During the rain season (May to November) large areas of the “Llanos Bajos” are often under water for weeks and during the dry season the sun converts the same region into dry desserts with deep cracks. In the Llanos nature lovers will find unlimited abundance of wild animals and at the same time adventure, recreation, fresh air, long horse rides, solid meals, historical places and the Alma Llanera, the spirit of the Llanos.

The Llanos are characterized by the Llaneros who – in the same way as the North American cowboys – round up and tend the cows.

In any case, when traveling to Venezuela you should not miss out on a visit to a cattle farm, the so-called Hato. For visitors it is an unforgettable experience to enjoy a succulent steak and the sight of the starry sky around a campfire at a Parrilla (barbecue) in company with the locals. The experience is rounded up by the dances and the music of the Llaneros.

Simon Bolivar Peak (5007 m), National Park Sierra Nevada

THE ANDES

The Roof of Venezuela offers a contrasting nature

The relatively small section of the Andes on Venezuelan territory is part of the eastern foothills of this enormous mountain chain that in the west extends through the whole South American continent with a length of 9,500 km.

The Cordillera de Mérida takes up the greatest part of the Venezuelan Andes in the south of the Maracaibo Lakes. In Venezuela the Cordillera de Mérida has the highest elevations and above all, the Pico Bolívar with a height of 5007 m above mean sea level. This part of the Andes reaches to the Falcon Mountains in the north turning then into the coastal cordilleras. Here there are many glacier lakes, different relief and rock formations, tropical and cloud forests as well as a plant diversity that reflects the biodiversity of the region.

These sights are within easy reach by cable car from Mérida. With a length of 12.5 km and a height of 4,765 m above mean sea level, the Mérida cable car is the longest and highest cable car in the world. The trip lasts about an hour and takes you from the subtropical valley to the world of the high mountains of Pico Espejo. The Andean metropolis and university town Mérida is the starting point for trips to the Andes and therefore the central point for mountain tourism in Venezuela.

HISTORY

Pemón child

On the South American continent – and therefore as well on the territory nowadays being Venezuela – the first human traces appear between 20,000 and 10,000 BC.

From the second millennium onwards small local cultures developed in the whole of South America. The Indian communities that still exist today descend from those cultures.

The discovery of America by Christopher Columbus and the resulting process of colonization represent a historical milestone in the late 15th century. What followed were centuries of conquest and colonization under Spanish rule.

There are two theories with regards to the origin of the name “Venezuela” (officially Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in Spanish “República Bolivariana de Venezuela“):

Some people ascribe it to Amerigo Vespucci who in 1499 lead an expedition along the northwest coast (nowadays known as the Golf of Venezuela). When they reached the Guajira Peninsula the crew saw the stilt houses that the Añu had constructed on the water. They reminded Vespucci on the town Venice and as a result, the region was called Venezuela meaning “little Venice”.

However, in his work “Summa de Geografía” the Spanish conqueror and geographer Martín Fernández de Enciso, member of the same crew, claims that the population of that region lived on a flat rock and that this place was called “Veneciuela”.

Declaration of the independence on 5 July 1811

VENEZUELA’S INDEPENDENCE

The revolution of the 19 April 1810 was the incident that initiated the conspiracy to the Independence of Venezuela. It was a grass-roots movement that took place in Caracas. On this day, celebrated as the day of the Proclamation of the independence of Venezuela, was created a government Junta, that was independent from the Spanish council of regents, it was constituted taking the following initiatives: creation of similar juntas in the provinces of Cumaná, Margarita, Barinas, Barcelona, Trujillo and Mérida, prohibition of slavery and dispatch of diplomatic delegations into the countries that would support the uprisings. England, the United States and New Granada (present-day Colombia) belonged to those countries. With this measure Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), who actively participated in the revolution of the 19 April, went with the rank of colonel on diplomatic mission to London. There he could gain the British government’s sympathy for the Venezuelan revolution. In London he met the Venezuelan hero Francisco de Miranda who had carried out Venezuela’s first liberation attack in 1806 and he asked him to return to Venezuela.

15 months after the said 19 April 1810, the Venezuelan revolution received a politically clearer form with the Declaration of Independence on 5 July 1811 (Today celebrated as the Independence Day of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). In this way Venezuela inaugurated the processes of Latin American independence. Nevertheless, this was just the beginning of a complex process of land and sea battles under Simón Bolívar’s command that ten years later, on the 24 June 1821, ended with the patriots’ victory in the Battle of Carabobo.

TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER

These days the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, under protection of the Bolivarian Revolution, as well as other nations of Latin America are living in a political process of change; it is a cross-boarder process of independization that will turn into a continental liberation movement of the peoples of our America.

Various countries have decided to create an alliance (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – ALBA) against the new forms of supremacy and to fight for the respect of and demand for socio-cultural diversity that would unite and characterise us. It is a fight for the implementation of the people’s rights that should guarantee their welfare and participation in the search of self-determination. It is also a fight for the consolidation of a fundament for the people’s self-determination and sovereignty and finally for the promotion of a community eager to advance the process of Latin American Union based on the principles of solidarity, complementarity and cooperation.

Simón Bolívar (1783-1830)

A YOUNG COUNTRY THAT LOVES MUSIC, ARTS AND LITERATURE

Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra

During the 16th century Venezuela saw its first important hybridization occurring between the original ethnic groups. The groups in question were those who at the time of arrival of the Spanish were living on Venezuelan territory and the African slaves that had been brought into the country for the cultivation of cacao. At the beginning of the 20th century various waves of immigration from Europe and other continents gave the Venezuelan people a multiethnic character. The cultural exchange resulting from the contact with other cultures influenced the customs, traditions, the way of thinking, the artistic forms of expression and the rhythms.

THE ORIGINS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN VENEZUELA

Venezuela is a country that is open to differences, with a hospitable spirit and with a joy and cheerfulness incomparable to any other people in the world. This is because the Venezuelan character has been marked by the unity of many cultures and religious believes. Venezuela is a young country with 80% of its population being below the age of 35. Its geography offers the ideal scenario for the cultural and scientific avant-garde that has expressed its interest in large cultural events without forgetting the content of the living traditions.

As an international representation of Venezuela's nation, its music is supported by the socially oriented government of the state. It is fair to say that the music and rhythms in Venezuela are as varied, lively and rich in contrast as its landscapes.

Venezuela's variety of music and lively rhythms is the result of mixed cultures that again have been marked differently by their geography, history and traditions.

The current government greatly supports and promotes musical talent. For this reason in 2007 the Mission Music (Misión Música) was founded as a social project that enables Venezuela's children access to choirs, orchestras and musical instruments. Nowadays more than 300,000 children take part in this project and it aims to reach one million children within the next years.

There are many outstanding literary genres in the Hispanic intellectual sector thanks to great works from novelists and thinkers like Rómulo Gallegos, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Guillermo Meneses, Salvador Garmendia as well as new generations of philosophers and authors.

Caracas

A VERY VARIED ARCHITECTURE

The Venezuelan architecture varies from one region to another. Inspired by the traditional buildings, the contemporary Venezuelan architecture developed through the combination of modern age architecture and elements of the tropics. Because of their uniqueness the UNESCO included two large urban projects in the list of world cultural heritage: the city of Coro being the only urban centre in America built with clay as well as the Campus of the Central University of Caracas.

Typical Venezuelan-Christmas-dinner: Hallacas

FOOD AND DRINKS

The Venezuelan cuisine is very varied as each region offers its own specialities. Venezuela is well-known for its beef. Those liking beef steaks can be sure to get high quality meat. But there are also excellent dishes containing chicken and most menus offer Parrilla – different sorts of grilled meat, blood sausage, and fried sausages. In Venezuela there is also a great variety of river and sea fish enriching the country's gastronomy. Oysters, mussels and other seafood are prepared and served in many different ways, especially on the coast.

For vegetarians there is also a great choice of different vegetables and there is an abundance of fruits in Venezuela: mango, papaya (lechosa), avocado (aguacate), oranges (naranja), bananas (cambur), coconuts (coco), passion fruit (parchita),

honeydew melon (melon), pineapple (piña), guava (guayaba) and custard apple (guanábana) are only some of them. The traditional types of vegetables in the country are manioc (Yuca), pumpkin (auyama), plantains (platanos), sweet potatoes (batatas) and potatoes (papas). There are also all kinds of different salads available everywhere in the country.

El Pabellón Criollo is the Venezuelan national dish. It consists of beef that has been torn apart, black beans (caraotas negras), rice, cheese and fried ripe plantains. Arepas – a kind of round flat dough-cake made of cornflower – are a popular side dish in the Venezuelan cuisine. They may contain all different kinds of fillings. There are fillings made of eggs, beef, chicken, ham, cheese, sausage and even prawns.

Empanadas (fried cornflour pastry filled with chicken, ham, cheese, meat or fish) and Cachitos (hot croissants filled with sliced ham and/or cheese) are also part of the Venezuelans' breakfast; and the Cachapas (thick, slightly sweet flat dough-cake made from fresh sweet corn topped with a kind of cheese similar to Mozzarella (queso guayanés) are a speciality in the eastern part of the country. Those visiting Venezuela in December should definitely try the Hallacas. It is the traditional Christmas meal and is prepared with minced pork and beef, chicken, onions, garlic, tomatoes, pepper, raisins, olives and different herbs and spices. The mixture is wrapped in a cornflour dough, enveloped in banana leaves and then boiled in water. Meanwhile there are also meatless alternatives for vegetarians.

Apart from the traditional Venezuelan dishes, Venezuela also has a great choice of international cuisines on offer. In most large cities you can find everything from Italian to Chinese or Japanese restaurants. Various fast food chains are widely spread and hamburger and hotdog stands can be found at almost every corner.

Arepas with typical stuffings

Drinks

Fresh fruit juices are available all over Venezuela, either as batidos (pieces of fruits with water, ice and sugar prepared in a mixer) or merengada (milkshake).

Sugar cane juice with limes (papelón con limón) and fresh coconut water are also sold at kerbside stands. The Venezuelans' favourite spirit drink is rum and several long drinks are prepared with it.

Coffee is cultivated in Venezuela and it is the most widespread hot drink. To visitors it is served in small cups as a welcoming drink (very sweetened). The cafés offer a wide choice of the black drink: Negrito (strong coffee without milk), con leche (coffee with milk); Marrón (latte macchiato) and Guayoyo (very thin coffee).

LOOK FORWARD TO VISITING VENEZUELA – VENEZUELA IS LOOKING FORWARD TO YOUR VISIT!

República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Official language	Spanish, the indigenous languages are also permitted to the indigenous people
Form of government	Presidential Republic
Head of State and Head of Government	President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías (since 1999)
Independence from Spain	proclaimed on 19 April 1810, declared on 5 July 1811
National Holiday	5th of July
Area	916,445 square kilometres
Political structure	23 federal states, 1 main district and 72 islands
Capital	Caracas (approximately 6 Million inhabitants including extended catchment area)
Inhabitants	29.3 Million (2010)
Population density	31.9 inhabitants per square kilometre
Population growth	1.41% (2011)

Geographical location	South America in the tropical belt: 0°38' N -15° 42' N / 58°10' W - 73°25' W
Temperature	The average temperature of the whole country during the whole year is 23°C.
Nature reserves	43 national parks, 35 protected natural monuments and 7 wildlife reserve areas cover approx. 22%
Currency designation	Bolívar Fuerte (Bs.F.)
Exchange rate	4,30 Bs F./US$
GDP (PPP)	$374.111 billion (2011)
GDP per capita (PPP)	$12,568 (2011)
GDP real growth rate	4.2% (2011); 5,6 (first quarter 2012)
Human Development Index (HDI)	0,756 high (2011)

LEGAL NOTICE

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